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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001634

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TAGS: PGOV PREL I2

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT TALABANI ON TAWAFUQ, SOFA/SFA, LEBANON,  
TRAVEL

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Patricia A. Butenis for reasons 1.4(b)  
and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a May 27 meeting, President Talabani said VP Hashimi and PM Maliki had agreed on the names of seven Tawafuq ministers who would join the Cabinet, and were working on a compromise to replace Minister of Planning Ali Baban in two months. He said the May 26 Political Council for National Security (PCNS) meeting reached no decisions on the SOFA/SFA negotiations because most people did not really understand the negotiations, and since none of the deputies were present there was no one to explain them. The issue will have to be revisited at the next PCNS meeting. Talabani briefly mentioned the situation in Lebanon, and went over some of the near-term travel plans of the GOI leadership.  
End Summary.

TAWAFUQ MINISTERS

¶2. (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador on May 27, President Talabani passed over a handwritten list of seven Tawafuq ministers (listed below) who had been agreed to by VP Hashimi and PM Maliki, saying that the two are still arguing about what should happen to Minister of Planning Ali Baban. Talabani is urging Hashimi to accept a compromise whereby Baban would stay in place for two months and then be replaced by a Tawafuq minister. Tawafuq would thus receive eight ministries total, compared to the six it had before it withdrew from the government. According to Talabani, Hashimi said he would try to convince his Tawafuq colleagues to accept that. Talabani commented that he is encouraging Hashimi to be a little more flexible now, because "the climate with Maliki is very good now." Maliki is feeling confident and believes that Hashimi and ISCI leader Abdel Aziz al Hakim are no longer against him.

¶3. (C) The list of ministers (which comes to seven, not eight) is as follows:

Deputy Prime Minister: Rafi al-Assawie  
Ministry of Education: Abd al Rahman al-Hussayni  
Ministry of Culture: S'adoun al Dulaimi  
Ministry of State for Foreign Affairs: Omer al Jbouri or Quraysh (NFI)  
Ministry of Women's Affairs: Nawal al Sammarai  
Ministry of Communications: Farouq (NFI)  
Ministry of Planning: will be decided later

SOFA/SFA DISCUSSION AT THE PCNS

¶4. (C) Talabani said the May 26 Political Council for National Security (PCNS) meeting "was not good," but reassured the Ambassador that no decisions had been made. He noted that former PM Jaafari was at the meeting for the first time in a long time, and that in fact, only the Sadrists were

absent. The SOFA/SFA negotiations were discussed, but Talabani said ruefully that no one at the meeting really understood what was going on with the negotiations, and there was no one present capable of explaining them -- none of the deputies were present, including Deputy FM Mohammed Haj Hammoud, Deputy PM Barham Salih, and FM Zebari. Talabani said the PCNS had decided to hire expert consultants to explain the issues, including whether extension of Chapter VII protection for Iraq's assets might be a good option, and concluded that the preparatory committee had much work to do in order to be ready to explain the negotiations at the next PCNS meeting. The Ambassador urged Talabani to have the Executive Council, plus Massoud Barzani, discuss the SOFA/SFA issues, noting that issues such as security assurances and possible limited extension of Chapter VII protection need decisions from that level of the leadership. The Executive Council must offer direction to advance the process, so that the PCNS can make sensible decisions.

LEBANON

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¶5. (C) In a brief aside on Lebanon, Talabani mentioned that he had sent a congratulatory telegram to newly-elected President Michel Suleiman, and had spoken to Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri. He commented that Hezbollah had made a big mistake by taking over West Beirut, because it stripped away their pretext that they were only using arms against Israel and proved that they are using arms and violence in order to gain control in Lebanon. And at the same time, Talabani commented, they are being very foolish in making a lot of noise about creating a Shia state in Iraq.

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TRAVEL PLANS

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¶6. (C) Talabani went over various travel plans: Maliki will be in Stockholm for two or three days for the ICI meeting and will then return to Baghdad; VP Abdel Mehdi is in Tehran; Hashimi is Jordan (where, he said, King Abdullah will give him good advice); and Talabani himself plans to go to Sulemانيyah for the day on June 1, which is the anniversary of the founding of the PUK. He also confirmed that French FM Kouchner will arrive in Iraq on May 31, and said Kouchner would have dinner at Talabani's residence that night.

BUTENIS